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IN JOSEPHINE'S GARDEN.

BY GAIL HAMILTON.

OVER a little old colonial table, in the little red dining-room, has lain spread for many years, a cover of flimsy and faded silk. The inwrought blue scroll-work holds bravely its own, but the pink ground is pale with age. Its roses climb with a curve as spirited as that of their first blooming, but their hues are as dead as their perfume. Upon the silken tissue rests a picture of many-colored waters, a sea, as it were, of glass mingled with fire, beneath the radiating splendors of a tropical sunset. Close below, against the phantom roses, lies a real rose, folded and stiff, yet red and rich, with long stem and bold leaves and palpable thorns; but as still in death as the faded silk and the painted sea. Between the phantom fabric and the crushed and pulseless rose, stretch, ah! what woful memories, what a tragedy of youth and beauty and love and power, crumbling into failure and dire defeat and bitter death!

For the blue scroll and the woven rose are waifs blown to me from Josephine's Martinique over the golden azure and purple sea painted into my golden frame by a hand I love, beneath eyes that beheld the glory; and the red rose, faded and fragrant, I plucked from Josephine's own rose-garden at Malmaison.

Strange working of fate, that not her beauty or her brilliant fortune, but her degradation, was what gave her immortality. The dread of her life and her final despair became her royal and lasting crown. Had Josephine died the wife of Napoleon, she would have been known but derivatively to posterity as Napoleon's wife. Discarded by him, the ages have adopted her as a hero in her own right, and have conferred upon her the distinction of individual remembrance.

Underneath the crown and the doom, the glamour of empire and of martyrdom, what was Josephine? Between the rhapsody of her admirers and the revenges of her detractors, is it possible to get at the real woman, at the real man, at their actual relations to each other, at the truth of their love, at the nature of their ambition, at the fact of their fidelity? Perhaps not entirely, with absolute certainty; for the testimony of eye- and ear-witnesses is only valuable as we know the eyes and ears that witness. But in the deadly sweet stillness of Malmaison, Josephine smiled out of her rose-bower upon my eager, sympathetic questioning; Napoleon frowned sternly from his cabinet, yet softened, after all, to a questioning that was sympathetic; and thus, by the irresistible force of a common human nature deeper than any difference of time or blood or brain, they were constrained to lay aside all imperial reserve and tell their story, soul to soul. And it was a love story—not a perfect love; a sombre, an exacting, a suffering love, but a real, yes, and a great, love.

Meeting Napoleon thus, face to face and soul to soul, not only honest, but not on guard, we see that he is no demi-devil, as his enemies depict him, nor is he the demi-god of his worshippers—not a monster of intelligence, not a monster of heartlessness. He had a marvellous military genius, which sometimes blundered. He had a marvellously luminous intellect, which was sometimes obscured. He had a marvellously magnetic heart, with the possibility of cruel throbs. By such token he descends from the throne where eloquence had placed him, a sceptred hermit, wrapped in the solitude of his own originality, but only to mount another throne, not less lofty because more intelligible; a leader of the masses, but of the masses himself—no hermit, in no solitude, but a man among men, and most a man of all, towering, magnificent, wholly human.

And Josephine—her faith, her devotion, her dignity are not imperilled because, in the intimate revelation of her rose-garden, she, too, confesses the impress of her time and her surroundings. She is always fair, graceful, elegant, whether in the simple muslin of her rural retreat, or in the heavy heart-weight of her coronation robes, kneeling to receive the crown proudly from the proud hand of her self-crowned Emperor, or standing in statuesque sorrow, avenged by fate for her discrowned state by the stately homage of conquering kings. Fair and graceful she shall remain,

and envious history point to the ravages of time upon her beauty, in vain.

With the scandals of her court it is idle to deal. They have been a thousand times proved and disproved. But her own words and deeds—these are a trustworthy indication of her character, and from these, which withdraw no measure from our pity for her suffering or from our admiration of her virtue, we may yet learn a lesson—which neither Napoleon nor Josephine ever drew—of the inexorable reign of law.

So, then, it must be said of these two, so high, so low, that they broke the universal law and tempted their fate. Great in strength, they were equally yoked in weakness. Distinguished for tact, Josephine sometimes and signally failed in tact. With an acute intelligence in her social sphere and for her own personal bearings, she failed utterly in a large intelligence for political affairs. She not only lacked the discernment necessary for discussion, but the discernment necessary for reticence. She failed not only to give her husband the stimulus of suggestion, but the repose of confidence. “A secret is burdensome to Josephine,” he said, with amiable satire.

“Josephine,” he dared patronizingly to address her, “your heart is excellent, but your reason feeble.”

And Josephine herself confessed—avowed—with unconscious frankness, not even seeing whereunto the confession tended, “I never beheld Napoleon for a moment perfectly at ease, not even with myself. If at any time he appears to show a little confidence, it is merely a feint to throw the person with whom he converses off his guard, and to draw forth his sentiments; but never does he himself disclose his real thoughts.”

This in no wise militates against the indubitable fact of his love. Her gentleness, her amiability, her love for him, won his strong attachment. He found no fault with her for not keeping a secret; he simply confided no secrets to her keeping. He missed in her no stimulus; he was not wont—apparently he did not need—to receive any stimulus from others. He pleased her by protesting that he loved “kind, gentle, conciliatory women”; and of such was Josephine—“feminine, unaffected, and amiable, for they alone resemble you.” He doubtless believed, if he thought anything about it, that a woman with mind complementary or corresponding to his own would have been hard, disgraea-

ble, unmanageable, troublesome; but even in 1889 men have not widely discovered the contrary. Napoleon would have been in advance not only of his own age, but of ours, if he had thought otherwise. Men still trust their theories more than they trust nature.

Nevertheless, it remains that, regarding one whole department of Napoleon's life, Josephine stood outside.

He loved her as men love women to-day—because she was charming: “I never saw her act inelegantly,” he said, “during the whole time we lived together”—a rare and delightful trait, worthy to bring a woman the love of a great man.

Because she was well dressed: “She was the goddess of the toilet. Everything she put on appeared elegant”—a desirable and powerful achievement, still more rare and difficult, and, despite all prejudice to the contrary, nowhere more difficult than in Paris, ravaged by clumsy *couturières*.

Because she was kind and humane: “She was the most graceful lady and the best woman in France.” On her deathbed she had the divine consolation of feeling “with truth, in this, my dying hour, that I never caused a single tear to flow.” With truth, indeed, if wanton cause were meant.

“She possessed a perfect knowledge of the different shades of my character, and evinced the most exquisite tact in turning this knowledge to the best account.” Yet Napoleon not only divorced her, but, what was worse, snubbed her—worse in manner, if not worse in substance. And this he could do openly, before her own ladies, sending her away cowering and ashamed. Then Josephine must have been sadly wanting in tact, or sadly ignorant of some shades of his character—if Napoleon means not to confess himself utterly brutal. And, with a capacity for brutality, he was not utterly brutal.

Certain it is that something other than mere materialism, in whatever grace of blossoming, was necessary to attract his friendship and secure his attachment. His love was not outrushing to youth and beauty. His best and most lasting devotion was to higher qualities. He could be brutal, even to women, but he was far from being wholly brutal. That he was a military monstrosity devoid of heart can never be believed by mind-readers, by character-readers. The man whose family, whose friends, whose discarded wife prayed for the privilege of immolating themselves

with him on the frighful fatal island where England bound him, to her lasting shame ; the man whose comrades suffered every discomfort, not only, but every indignity, that they might soothe his exile ; the man for love of whom thousands gladly, passionately, laid down life ; the man for whom a fellow-sufferer refused deliverance even at his death, but voluntarily wore out seventeen years of solitary exile to guard his grave,—was a man of heart as extraordinary as his head. Nay, the very act of his life—blunder or crime—which broods forever in the silence of Malmaison, carries with it the incontestable proof of his tenderness. It was a crime and a blunder, but it was conducted from beginning to end with every delicacy which could veil a cruel act, with every honor which could attend degradation, with every sign which could attest suffering.

The shadow of her doom hung over Josephine's path long before the blow fell. From an early period she had sought, with innocent wiles, to centre the hopes of Napoleon upon his stepson, her Eugene. Her husband's keen perception divined easily her intent. "She never," he said, looking back afterwards, "showed any additional complaisance or assiduity when Eugene was receiving from me the greatest honor. Her grand aim was to assume that all this was *my* affair—that Eugene was *our* son, not hers. Doubtless she entertained the idea that I would adopt Eugene as my successor."

Napoleon saw what the poor hunted creature would be at, and he held his peace. His resolution was inflexible, but he would not anticipate torture. Yet his silence was her keenest foreboding. But when the deed was done, he was willing to remember her fancy, and use it to soothe her anguish and retain her friendship. In announcing to her the birth of his son, he suggested with kindly craftiness: "This infant, in concert with *our* Eugene, will constitute my happiness and that of France." He was not "our Eugene" enough to save Josephine, but enough "ours" to soothe her when lost ; and poor, shallow Josephine did not remember, did not resent, but walked into the little trap and was tremulously pleased. "Is it possible," she exclaimed on reading, but not recognizing, this mockery, of her own wish and words, "—is it possible to be more amiable ? This uniting my son with his own is, indeed, worthy of him." Napoleon saw through Josephine, but Josephine did not see through Napoleon.

Now, it is no discredit to a man not to understand a woman, because she is the more complex, the more highly organized, the superior being ; but it is the business of a woman to understand the man.

With never-ceasing regret we must own that, when innocent wiles failed, Josephine had resort to wiles not innocent. Her own anguish blinded her to the weight of another's anguish, and she sought to avert fate from herself by means as cruel, as pitiless, as inadmissible as those wherewith Napoleon overpowered her. Unrelenting, this gentle, faithful lover, sacrificed to her love, her child. Her beautiful Hortense, fair, delicate, petted, gentle, brilliant, and gay, in the first freshness of life's morning, loved Duroc, and was beloved by him ; a handsome, winsome man, a skilful general, a dear friend of the Emperor. It was a prudent as well as a proper marriage, but it would give no additional security to Josephine. Whereas, if Hortense should marry Louis, a favorite brother of Napoleon, their son would inherit the name and blood of Bonaparte, and thus might well become that longed-for and seemingly-imperative thing, Napoleon's heir. Then might Josephine retain her rank and—let us be just—her love. The stakes she played for were high. Women seldom have a more terrible temptation, and Josephine—fell.

Louis, too, was a victim, but not wholly of Josephine. Napoleon sinned the sin of Louis, and with less of temptation than Josephine. Josephine's motive was to avert the bitterness of death. Napoleon's was only to build up the pomp of life. Louis, not without virtues, intellect, imagination, had early become absorbed in a passionate and ennobling love for a daughter of the old nobility. But the old nobility, devoted to royal interests, might interfere with Napoleon's plans, and the marriage was prevented. From this disappointment Louis never recovered. Naturally pensive, not too forceful, and, at best, but little ambitious, he became taciturn, lost the last vestige of political aspiration, clung in solitude to study, and refused to listen to any proposal for any marriage.

Josephine manœuvred awhile, unsupported. "Josephine," said Napoleon, succinct as ever and, as ever, clear-sighted to her little schemes, " labors in vain. Duroc and Hortense love each other and they shall be married. I am attached to Duroc. He is well born. He is brave. He is general of division." This is

amiable and admirable. Napoleon plays well the part of benevolent and direct father against ambitious mother. We should be glad to think, also, that he had learned, in the matter of his brother, the evil of interfering with the course of true love, and would no more of it. Unhappily, the cloven foot appears in the next sentence : “ *Besides, I have other views for Louis.*”

But Josephine’s inflexibility against her own divorce outwore Napoleon’s negative advocacy of Duroc, and she prevailed. The loving young girl was separated from her lover and married to the disappointed, moody, and reluctant recluse—unwilling bride to unwilling bridegroom.

To whom for a good ? The little heir came—and went before the innocence of infancy faded from his brow. Another succeeded him, but alienation and disappointment combined to set a shadowy bar-sinister upon his escutcheon, which never wholly faded out, and against which no dream ever could endow him with the inheritance of France. When all who had wrought the evil upon his parents and upon him were in their graves, he made himself Emperor for twenty inglorious years, to die in exile, leaving a dubious name ; leaving France defeated, shamed, enraged, athirst for revenge, at the feet of her foes ; leaving his one son, his one feeble Prince Imperial, to die prematurely, rushing unsummoned into a war without laurels, perishing miserably under the onslaught of a savage ambuscade.

“ Ah ! the pity for Josephine,” said one, when her grief and fate were at their crisis.

“ Pity Josephine !” hissed Duroc, pointing to a group where his wife and Hortense stood side by side. “ Look at those women. One is heaven; the other hell ! No, I do not pity her !”

What Napoleon did in divorcing Josephine was to turn his back upon the impelling force of his life, upon his political principles, upon his ecclesiastical polity, and divorce himself from his strength. It is hard to see how a man so gifted with insight could, in any sphere, be so blind. Thoroughly a man of the future, he threw himself into the arms of the past, which was, in him, a thousand-fold more weak than if he had been born to the past. Abandoning, or, at least, ignoring his sublime, because well-grounded, self-confidence, he leaned upon the slender staff of a royal alliance, and it pierced him to the heart. It was all the stranger betrayal, because his confidence had

never betrayed him. In his young manhood, wooing Josephine in a rank above him, Barras had assured Josephine that, if she would marry Bonaparte, he would secure Bonaparte's appointment to the army of Italy, and thus elevate him to a rank nearer hers. "Do they think I need *their* protection to arrive at power?" haughtily, splendidly, exclaimed the twenty-six-years-old soldier. Did he then need the protection of tottering thrones to retain power? No man better than he understood, or even to-day understands, the right and the might of the masses, the sovereignty of the people. "My ambition," he confessed, "was great, but it rested upon the opinion of the masses. Called to the throne by the voice of the people, my maxim has always been, a career open to talent without distinction of birth." Yet against laws and interests of church and state, he set aside the woman who had risen with him from the masses, to ally himself with a daughter of royalty, in order that the Empire which he had shaped by his own right arm should descend, like the kingdoms which he overcame, to a ruler by right of birth!

The idea that a prescribed birth was necessary to the stability of his Empire, or could so much as secure it, was, of itself, a stultification, was to discredit his own title. Had he inherited his position? Nay, he boasted, righteously, "I became by my own exertions"—not by any transmission of blood—"the most powerful Monarch of the Universe." What had he to do with dynasties except to overthrow them, or, if need be, readjust them according to the new time? To found them was to begin again the old dull round of things, which had given way before the blows of his genius like the dust-decayed bole of a stately-seeming tree. When Bourrienne expressed his fear that Napoleon could not get himself acknowledged as Emperor by the old dynasties, he gayly retorted: "If it comes to that, I will dethrone them all, and then I shall be the oldest sovereign among them." It was the light-heartedness of conscious superb strength; and he turned from it to invoke the aid of an heredity in itself weak, but for him weakness itself!

On the night preceding his coronation, Josephine prevailed upon Napoleon to consent to a private religious celebration of their marriage, while already he was meditating its violation. Present ease was palpable; the tears of Josephine were immediate; the sanction or ban of heaven was neither,—but was yet so

efficient a factor in organized society that he forbade to appear at court a woman who had been kind to Josephine in adversity, and whom Josephine gratefully wished to reward with imperial recognition ; forbade her because he was desirous of strengthening more and more the church he had re-established, by keeping at a distance from his court all who may have availed themselves of an opportunity for a divorce !

The peasant women who cried, “Napoleon is *our* King, but the Bourbons were the Kings of the Nobles,” Napoleon declared to have sounded the key-note of the whole matter. How, then, could he strike such discord as to dethrone “our Empress,” beloved by the people, and dream of establishing himself more firmly in their affection and accord by crowning an Empress of the Nobles—the hostile and hated Hapsburgs ?

“Are nations simple enough to believe themselves the property of a family?” he asked, with the conclusive incisiveness of pure logical statement,—and forthwith broke hearts and laws for the sake of creating a family to own the French nation !

“When I heard the result of the battle of Waterloo,” said one, “I felt as if the clock of the world had gone back six ages.” But of the hour struck at Waterloo, Napoleon himself had sounded the alarm when he turned from the resources of his own luminous intellect, the support of the enthusiastic masses whom he drew irresistibly to his side, the beneficence of the institutions which he had given to France, broke the heart of the best woman, and the highest law in France to entrench himself in a law which the world had begun to outgrow, and which his own clear brain had signally and repeatedly denounced. Before the clock of Waterloo went back Napoleon had tampered with the works !

But if Napoleon betrayed his principles, so, it must be admitted, did Josephine betray her instincts. Napoleon was resolved upon the divorce. That she could not help. She could have helped consenting to it. She had deprecated his assumption of the estate of monarch, foreseeing, forereading what it meant for her, but I find no shred of testimony that she ever took her stand upon eternal right and wrong. I find no evidence that she ever presented to him, or herself discerned, the imperiousness of moral obligation, the inviolable sacredness of the marriage vow, the certain duty they owed to civilization and Christianity beyond any uncertain duty of founding a dynamic dynasty.

Josephine did but as many wives do—threw all the anguished energy of her heroism into conforming her own will to the will of her husband, rather than into conforming her husband's will to the will of God, to the everlasting law of righteousness.

Without vulgar contention, without active participation, by simply refusing to sign her name, by submitting to be a victim but declining to become an accomplice, Josephine would have preserved the full dignity of her position. Napoleon would have completed the divorce; would have compelled the sacrifice of her happiness; but he could not have compromised herself. Her position would have been commanding. As it was, she did but vie with him in his own line, and missed the great opportunity for a great deed—a helpless but imperial protest against wrong.

She went further. She not only gave in her adhesion to his will,—which was not even a virtue, since his will was law,—but she ran ahead of his will, bought or sought his continued friendship and companionship by taking a part, hideously unbecoming, in his unholy alliance. She entertained and expressed a preference as to the wife he should choose, and even offered her services to secure the Austrian connection; thus demonstrating that, in the matter of this divorce, her *morale* was no higher than Napoleon's.

And what good came of it at last? *quoth little Peterkin.*

Wreck,—swift, complete. Wreck to Napoleon of love, of ambition, as total as the wreck he wrought on Josephine. The desired heir was born, a beautiful boy,—and there was no kingdom to inherit. While he was yet a prattling baby, the great new government vanished into a memory, and France was delivered by foreign foes to her domestic foes. Napoleon's own eyes saw her forced back into the hands from which she had torn herself free—forced back under those Bourbons whom he justly taunted with having lived for twenty years on the charity of foreigners, in open war with the principles and the interests of France.

The young wife who was to bring her husband the flying buttress of a Royal house, made a faint-hearted attempt to aid him with her feeble influence and her feeble presence; then went her feeble way and consoled herself with another man—more her nature's mate—in some ignoble, unacknowledged, unhandsome marriage, if marriage, indeed, it were.

The haughty Hapsburg father had eaten humble pie as greed-

ily as any parvenu, and courted the Corsican soldier for his daughter when the Corsican was successful; but haughty Hapsburgs can turn a corner or a coat, for their own advantage, as fast as common earth. "My father," said the daughter of the Cæsars, "would never consent to the Emperor's dethronement. He repeated to me over and over again, when he placed me on the French throne, that he would always maintain me in that station; and my father is rigidly true to his word."

But "my father" piped to another key. "Francis," said the Czar, with all the *sang froid* of Artemus Ward, "—Francis will sacrifice all his personal affections for the repose of Europe."

And Francis did!

When the daughter of the Cæsars fled from the palace of the people's Emperor, the thunder of her father's approaching cannon told her how rigidly he was keeping his word!

The heir who was to be all carefully trained to preserve and transmit the great governmental system of his great father, lived his short life in profound obscurity, and of him the world knows scarcely more than name. On the horrid, torrid rock where the cruel and sovereign cowards fettered their great enemy,—sovereign because their sudden terror of this Man of the People overpowered their squabbles against each other long enough to permit them to combine to crush him,—no solace of wife or child was his. He never again heard the sweet, lisping voice, or saw the sunny, dimpling face, or felt the waxen touch of the baby fingers. In his bitter sorrow at St. Helena for these dear ones, did ever remorse come to him for the wives he forbade to Louis and Duroc; for the wife whom he plucked from Jerome; for the husband whom he forbade to Hortense, of whom he robbed Josephine?

No. Strange blindness of clear eyes—apparently never. All his plans had failed, and noble plans they were: the hands upon the dial-plate of Europe have not yet passed the hour that struck at Waterloo; yet Napoleon had so little learned the lesson that he could pause on the threshold of another world to murmur: "If my son remains in exile, let him marry one of my nieces; if France recalls him, let him seek the hand of a Russian princess."

I discern no sign that Napoleon ever discovered the moral wrong, or ever even appreciated the extent or the nature of Josephine's keen suffering. "There are moral laws as inflexible and imperious as physical laws," he said sagely, and could see that

the Bourbons had broken them in misgoverning France ; but never could he see that he had broken them in repudiating Josephine. He was naïvely and really surprised at the poignancy of her grief, when he announced his resolution of divorce. He had told Hortense ! Hortense should have prepared her for it ! “ I thought she had more firmness ! ” He confessed too much in designating his Austrian marriage as an “ abyss covered with flowers.” The flowers should have been for him what they were for Josephine, bitter rue and baleful aconite ; but call them by what name we will, their distilled essence was a fatal poison to both—and he did not know it.

Of all the actors in that sad drama, Josephine wears the laurels. The world has agreed to overlook her weakness, to ignore her wrong ; to remember only her wrongs, her dignity, her fidelity. Even on the low level where Napoleon the Great shrivelled to Napoleon the small, the future avenged Josephine. It is her descent, not his, that reigns in Europe to-day. The young prince who lately came down the steps of a throne to marry the girl he loved, has Josephine’s blood in his veins, while the young girl who has just revolted Christendom with her unnatural marriage, is of the blood and name of Bonaparte.

Justly is Josephine crowned with the crown of them who love much. Her cruelty was not of her nature, but sprang from the frenzy of her despair. The comfort of her last hour, that she had never caused a single tear to flow, was worth an angel’s remembrance. For all that Napoleon had done to wring her heart and wound her pride, she protested that she never felt the full extent of her trouble till it prevented her from joining him in exile. And so, unable to bear his grief, which she could not share, with his picture in her hand, with his name upon her lips, she died.

GAIL HAMILTON.